



**File Code:** 1950  
**Date:** February 27, 2020

**Forest Plan Amendment for Bat Conservation Environmental Assessment**

Dear Stakeholder:

The Ozark-St. Francis National Forests have prepared an environmental assessment (EA) for the Forest Plan Amendment for Bat Conservation which includes a programmatic plan amendment to the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests' Revised Land and Resources Management Plan (Forest Plan). The plan amendment proposes to establish more targeted protective measures for threatened, endangered and sensitive (TE&S) bat species, including the Indiana bat, based on recent scientific data collection and monitoring.

The Proposed Action includes both administrative and actionable elements. Administrative elements provide clarity, as well as new definitions relating to threatened and endangered bat species on the Forests. Actionable elements include updating, adding and deleting Forest-Wide Standards, updating the silvicultural prescription for the Indiana Bat conservation zones, and adding a bat monitoring requirement to the forest plan monitoring strategy. This amendment is limited to the elements of the Plan related directly to bat conservation and is not intended as a major change to the current management approaches described in the Forest Plan. No changes were made to numbers of acres approved for desired age class distribution or timber harvest. This is a programmatic document, and decisions on any new projects that implement the Forest Plan will continue to have site-specific analyses completed that tier to the Forest Plan, as amended by this Proposed Action in a programmatic plan amendment. No ground-disturbing activities are authorized in this plan amendment and EA.

Management activities in the Forest Plan and addressed in this amendment can only take place on Forest Service property. No management activities are proposed for any private property adjacent to or within the proclamation boundary of the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests.

Key changes to the plan include:

- Changes to timing restrictions for tree cutting from the entire Indiana bat active season in the primary and secondary Indiana bat conservation zones to restricting tree cutting within the primary Indiana bat conservation zones and additional designated priority roosting zones during fall swarming periods (August 15 to November 30). Tree cutting would also be prohibited in the primary Indiana bat conservation zones during spring emergence (March 1 to April 30). This change also removes timing restrictions for prescribed fire from primary and secondary conservation zones.
- Known roosts for all Indiana bats and female northern long-eared bats are protected wherever they are found on the Forests, instead of only protecting roosts for Indiana bats within the Indiana bat conservation zones.



- Restriction to new permanent developments around gray bat and Ozark big-eared bat colony sites is extended to encompass ¼ mile around these sites instead of 200 feet around these sites.
- Add a new standard to protect Indiana bat maternity colony sites with a ¼ mile disturbance buffer during the maternity season (April 1 to August 15) and 150-foot year-round protections around colony trees until sites are no longer used as maternity roosts.
- Modifies the silvicultural prescription for Indiana bat management zone forest stands to better support management set forth in the Forest-Wide Standards and emphasizes strategies to promote high-quality roost trees over time.
- Adds mandatory monitoring of threatened, endangered, and sensitive bat populations and habitat to the Forest Plan monitoring strategy.

## WHERE TO FIND THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The EA is available online at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=55628>. The EA and supporting documentation are also available for review at the Supervisor's Office. I invite your comments on the proposed action, environmental assessment and plan amendment. The Interdisciplinary Team will use your comments as they identify issues and develop alternatives to the proposal for my consideration. Future environmental documents will be mailed to those who have commented on this proposal and to those who request a copy.

## HOW TO COMMENT

The analysis within the Forest Plan Amendment for Bat Conservation EA and the associated programmatic plan amendment will result in two separate decisions, which consequently require two separate but concurrent public comment periods. The EA is subject to administrative review under the 36 CFR 218 Project-Level Pre-decisional Administrative Review Process, Parts A and C. The proposed Forest Plan Amendment is subject to administrative review under 36 CFR 219, Parts A and B.

The opportunity to comment on this EA and plan amendment ends 30 days following the date of publication of the legal notice in *The Courier* of Russellville, Arkansas. Specific written comments (defined by 36 CFR 218.2 and 36 CFR 219.62) should be within the scope of the proposed action, have a direct relationship to the proposed action, and must include supporting reasons for the responsible official to consider. It is the responsibility of all individuals and organizations to ensure that their comments are received in a timely manner. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, we will not be able to provide the respondent with subsequent environmental documents. Only those who submit timely and specific written comments during this comment period established by the responsible official are eligible to file an objection (36 CFR 218.24 (b)(6)).

An objection period, if required, will follow the regulation found in 36 CFR 218.7. Issues to be raised in objections must be based on previously submitted specific written comments regarding



the proposed project and attributed to the objector, unless the issue is based on new information that arose after a designated opportunity to comment (36 CFR 218.8(c)). For objection eligibility, each individual or representative from each entity submitting timely and specific written comments regarding the proposed project must either sign the comments or verify identity upon request in accordance with 36 CFR 218.24(b)(8).

Comments on this EA and plan amendment can be submitted in four different ways.

1. Online: The project website contains a link to an electronic comment form to submit comments. Visit <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=55628> and click on the link on the right hand side of the page, "Comment/Object on Project."
2. By email: Email your comments to: [comments-southern-ozark-stfrancis@usda.gov](mailto:comments-southern-ozark-stfrancis@usda.gov). Please state "Forest Plan Amendment for Bat Conservation" in the subject line when providing comments by email. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc, .docx).
3. By mail: Our mailing address is: U.S. Forest Service, 605 W. Main Street, Russellville, AR 72801. Please state "Forest Plan Amendment for Bat Conservation" on the envelope when commenting by mail.
4. By phone call or in person: Business hours are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday (excluding federal holidays).

If you have questions on this project or the EA analysis, please contact Amy Burt at (479) 964-7282 or by email at [amy.burt@usda.gov](mailto:amy.burt@usda.gov).

Sincerely,



LORI WOOD  
Forest Supervisor